

Georgia School District Leaders' Perspectives on Parent Engagement and Transitions

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Introduction

Of the four million American children who start school each year, as many as one-third are unprepared to learn. Many never catch up. The reasons are complex, but clearly the multitude of systems that should be supporting young children too often fail in that mission – from family to schools to government.

In reaction, W.K. Kellogg Foundation launched Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK), an initiative designed to unite communities so that all children can be successful before and after they enter school. SPARK fosters partnerships of selected communities, schools, state agencies and families to ensure that they work together effectively for the early learning of children. With the initiative serving as a catalyst or “spark,” the goal is to ensure that vulnerable children are ready for school and that schools are ready for children.

SPARK is based on four key principles:

- Strong partnerships among families, providers, community organizations and ready schools ensure that all children can learn and succeed in school.
- Quality is a critical element of a child’s early learning, from birth through the early years of school.
- Parents and families at home and working with early-care providers are critical to ensuring that children succeed in school.
- School leaders and teachers, working with the community’s support, can create smooth transitions from early-learning settings so that children can succeed in school.

The initiative included grantees in eight locations: District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina and Ohio.¹

¹ Adapted from “Overview - SPARK,” W.K. Kellogg Foundation web site:
<http://wkkf.org/default.aspx?tabid=75&CID=168&NID=61&LanguageID=0>

SmartStart Georgia, the Early Childhood arm of the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta, is the grantee for SPARK Georgia. Through their efforts, the SmartStart Georgia team has created replicable models for engaging parents of children from birth to age eight and facilitating smooth transitions from early care and education to elementary school.

Specifically, SmartStart Georgia's SPARK work focused on the following strategies:

- Use Title I funds to start-up and train school transition councils to develop annual transition plans. These plans include activities linking parents, early learning programs, and community groups to the schools and includes programs such as summer transition camps for rising 4 year old children and their families.
- Use Title I and other funds to train and certify existing school parent liaisons as Parents as Teachers (PAT) parent educators, using the Parents as Teachers *Born Learning* curriculum (a research-based nationally recognized method for engaging parents).
- Provide training, parent outreach, engagement, and leadership to existing Title I or III parent liaisons using the Parent Services Project's *Stronger Together* and *Parent Leadership Institute* curricula.
- Combine PAT, Stronger Together, and Parent Leadership Institute curricula for use by community organizations which already have parent outreach workers (e.g. Even Start, Head Start, Family Connection).

The SmartStart Georgia team wanted to share their lessons learned in a thoughtful, targeted way, especially with school district leaders. As a starting point, they asked DCA, Inc., a Boston-based consultancy specializing in social change engaged by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to support SPARK grantees, to help them better understand:

- the level of leadership emphasis on early care and education in Georgia school districts;
- the current state of parent engagement and transitions programs in Georgia school districts;
- the most significant challenges faced by district leaders in engaging parents and ensuring smooth transitions; and
- what districts may be most receptive to replicating SmartStart Georgia's models.

DCA took two approaches to surveying the Georgia School District leaders:

- One-on-one interviews, by telephone and in person, were offered to superintendents in nineteen Georgia districts².
- DCA conducted an online survey, offered via email to the remaining 161 superintendents in the State of Georgia.

One-on-one Interviews

Of the nineteen school districts contacted for one-on-one interviews, eight districts elected to participate. The interviews, conducted from July 2008 to August 2008, included superintendents, Title I directors and other key staff (a complete list of interviewees can be found in appendix A).

Online survey

The online survey was conducted using Survey Monkey. Respondents were asked 31 questions (the full questionnaire appears in Appendix B). There were a total of 78 responses, 74 of which were from unique school districts (46% of the school districts that were invited to participate). Of the completed surveys, 60% answered every question; the remaining surveys had one or more questions with no response. (Appendix C has a complete list of the districts which responded). Respondents were primarily superintendents (78%), with the remainder being Title I, Title III or Federal Funds directors (Table 1 shows the titles of respondents for the online survey).

Table 1
Online Respondents' Titles

Challenge Category	Percentage
Superintendent	78%
Title I Director	10%
Title III Director	1%
Federal Funding Director	5%
Other title	6%

² These districts were selected in coordination with the SmartStart Georgia team. The districts included ones in the metropolitan Atlanta as well as other urban, suburban, and rural communities in Georgia

District characteristics

A total of 82 districts were included in this survey (i.e., those interviewed one-on-one and those who responded online), comprising 46% of all the districts in Georgia. Of this total:

- Thirteen (16%) are in the 25 school districts with the largest student populations in Georgia;
- Sixteen (20%) are in the 25 school districts with the smallest student population;
- Only two (2%) have less than 25% of their student body eligible for free or reduced lunch; and
- Thirteen (16%) have more than 75% of their student body eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Observations

Meeting the challenges of Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) and high stakes testing is critical

One of the one-line survey's first questions asked respondents to name their single greatest challenge. This was an open-ended question; yet, many responses echoed the same concerns so they were grouped into categories (shown in Table 2). The most frequent concern was about meeting the challenges of high stakes testing and ensuring annual yearly progress (28% of respondents listed this as their top challenge).

Interestingly, even though the question was asking broadly about the leader's district-wide educational concerns, 10% of respondents focused on the early years, stating kindergarten readiness skills was a key challenge. Furthermore, the concern about kindergarten readiness skills did not correlate with the percentage of children in pre-kindergarten (hereafter, pre-K) programs in the given district (i.e., the concern was equally reported by those leaders in districts with significant pre-K enrollment as those with low-levels).

Table 2
Online Respondents' Single Greatest District Challenge by Category of Response

Challenge Category	Percentage
High stakes testing & meeting AYP	28%
Meeting the instructional needs of all children	13%
No response	12%
Kindergarten readiness skills	10%
Countering the effects of generational poverty	9%
Supporting special needs children	8%
Family engagement	8%
Math achievement	5%
Having enough time in the school day	5%
Ensuring teachers have the time they need	3%
Ensuring quality education despite low funding	3%
English Language Learners	3%
Transient populations	1%
Reading achievement	1%
Attendance	1%

The concern about kindergarten readiness was echoed in our one-on-one interviews where educational leaders listed high stakes test scores as their top concern and the primary metric they are using to evaluate the success of any new initiative.

The state of school readiness is mixed

Thirty-five percent of the online survey respondents believe their students entering kindergarten generally do not meet their readiness expectations. The indication of student readiness did not correlate with district size or student poverty level, but did appear to relate to whether children had the benefit of attending pre-k. Of the respondents who believed their students are generally ready for kindergarten, 78% reported their districts have 3% or more of their 4 year-olds enrolled in pre-K, compared to only 52% of those districts who believed their children were not ready. Additionally, 86% of the respondents reporting that their children are generally *not* ready lack a school-district pre-K program. Table 3 summarizes the key readiness gaps reported by these educational leaders; literacy and social emotional skills top the list, but cognitive skills were also a significant concern.

Table 3
Significant readiness gaps reported by online respondents whose entering kindergartners are not ready to learn

Challenge Category	Percentage
Literacy skills (pre-reading)	96%
Social/emotional skills	81%
Cognitive skills	62%
Physical skills	23%
Other	4%

Even in cases where the majority of a district's students are entering school ready to learn (as was reported by 66% of the online respondents), there could be reason for pause. In our one-on-one interviews, leaders told us they believe the level of children's readiness is tied to their early care and education experience, which varies greatly. There was a general sense that lottery-funded pre-K programs, whether inside the schools or outside, produce children at the highest levels of school-readiness. However, only about 40% of our one-on-one interviewees and 73% of the online respondents reported having a school district lottery-funded pre-K program³. In the one-on-one interviews we heard that in many cases districts that had fast growing populations had pre-K programs, but eliminated them due to a lack of classroom space. Overall, even in districts that have pre-K programs, there is a keen desire to expand school- and community-based pre-K in support of school readiness. There is also the desire to increase the effectiveness of existing early care and education providers.

English language learners are on the rise but not a driving concern for most leaders

Of our respondents, the majority (67%) reported having less than 5% of their elementary population composed on non-English speakers. For most of the districts (63%) this meant 100 to 500 elementary students district-wide. However, 63% of the district leaders reported that they anticipate the number of non-English speaking elementary school students will increase or significantly increase in the next three to five years.

³ However, in our one-on-one interviews we did hear that, even where there was no school district pre-k programs for all students, there were always some access for special needs students.

There is a perception that funding is becoming even more constrained

In every one-on-one conversation, the interviewees noted the need for more funding and their fear that funding was going to tighten further. As one leader stated in the online survey:

“We are continually asked to do more with less. The burden on the local tax payer has gotten extremely great. A small percentage of the citizens are asked to pay the bill - the home owners.”

The concern about funding reflected the perspective that a “perfect storm” is forming. Where declining home values will reduce local revenues, there will be state-level cuts, and the potential of losing federal funding as well. In the latter category, a number of our interviewees believe their Title I federal funding could be in jeopardy, pointing to the recent elimination of Title V funding as an example.

Even with level funding, district leaders noted that their current budgets are committed – so any shifts of money to new programs require district leaders to make hard funding decisions and a clear justification of how the new spending will lead to a higher “return on investment.”

The lack of available funding and near- and long-term uncertainty around funding streams is a key barrier to the establishment of new programs. Among online respondents:

- Forty-seven percent reported the funding to initiate a parent engagement program is a key barrier;
- Sixty-five percent reported sustained funding for parent engagement programs is a key barrier;
- Eighty-six percent listed funding constraints as the primary barrier to establishing or expanding transition activities.

Districts have a number of parent engagement programs, but most are school-based

The majority of leaders engaged in our study noted a number of school-based parent engagement programs in their districts, such as:

- Including parents on programmatic design teams;
- Parent-teacher organizations;
- Parent newsletters;
- Teacher-parent conferences;
- Annual or periodic district-wide or school level fairs; and
- School-based parenting workshops.

Additionally, a number of leaders noted that there were few coordinated, district-wide initiatives, but instead they relied solely on the efforts of each school's principal.

The one-on-one interviewees also often talked about the effectiveness of their parent engagement programs referencing related measures, most frequently the number of parent-volunteers in the classrooms, the percentage of parents meeting with teachers annually, and attendance at school fairs.

Parent engagement is a high priority for district leaders but they lack the resources needed to expand programs

Almost every educational leader interviewed reported that increasing parent engagement was a high priority for their district regardless of current programs' effectiveness. This observation also played out in our online survey, where 82% stated improving or expanding parent engagement programs is a "high" or "very high" priority (see table 4 for reported priority levels). One superintendent, after detailing numerous district programs working to engage parents stated that, even with all this energy, he is still "concerned about parent engagement."

Table 4
Online respondents' priority for developing or improving parent engagement programs

Challenge Category	Percentage
Very high priority	42%
High priority	40%
Moderate priority	15%
Low Priority	3%
Very Low Priority	0%

The key barrier reported by district leaders is the lack of resources necessary to launch and sustain parent engagement efforts. As shown in table 5, the majority of online respondents were concerned about the lack of funding to sustain parent engagement efforts. This issue also arose in our on-on-one conversations where a number of leaders indicated an unwillingness to pursue any new parent engagement activity if there was less than three to five years' funding already secured for the effort. Their concern was that there were too many programs that came and went alternatively raising parent and staff expectations and then leading to disappointment when a lack of funding resulted in program cancellation.

Even if they have the money, a lack of staff to coordinate efforts can be a significant barrier. Repeatedly in one-on-one interviews, we heard about the lack of staff to coordinate district-level parent engagement programs. This is especially true when parent engagement efforts will involve home visitation or outreach to community organizations. Even when staff is available, some leaders noted the importance of having personnel who were skilled in, and relished, community and parent outreach and engagement. As one leader put it, "When you have the right people doing the right things, you get the right results." Conversely, we heard of one district employing a teacher in home visitation. The person wasn't trained in this work nor had a particular passion for it. Accordingly, the outcomes of the project were weak and it was discontinued.

Though educational leaders are proud of their parent engagement efforts, they also recognize that they need new ideas and methods. Over one quarter of on-line respondents noted that a lack of models for parent engagement was a key barrier (see table 5). As one superintendent put it: "We want to help [families], but we don't know how."

Table 5
Online respondents' key barriers to expanding parent engagement programs

Challenge Category	Percentage
Lack of funding to sustain efforts	66%
Not enough staff time	60%
Lack of funding to launch efforts	48%
Don't know of effective, low cost models	27%

Most school districts have parent outreach staff funded through Title I or III

Seventy-three percent of respondents reported having school district parent resource coordinators or district staff funded through Title I or III to support parent engagement. These school district staffers are:

- providing parenting literature to parents and/or community organizations (94% of respondents);
- visiting parents at home (74% of respondents);
- developing partnerships with community organizations (78% of respondents); and
- reaching out to child care providers and centers (50 % of respondents).

The number of district staff engaged in parent outreach using Title I and III funds may be misrepresented by the data above. In our one-on-one interviews, we found that, though a number of districts used Title I and III funds to fund parent outreach staff, the staff was often engaged at the discretion of individual school principals (who have decision-making authority in many districts over the bulk of Title I funds used at the school-level). Accordingly, some schools would have outreach staff while others would elect not to use their funds in this way.

Online respondents reported frequently using Title I and III funded district parent engagement staff for home visitation. In contrast, few of the leaders interviewed one-on-one reported using district staff for home visitation. Furthermore, our one-on-one interviewees often lacked a basic familiarity with this approach to parent engagement.

Educational leaders believe that parents want to support their young children's education, but lack time

In our one-on-one and online interviews, we heard clearly that district leaders do feel that parents want to support their children's education. In the online survey, district leaders cited the desire of parents to support their children's education as a key motivation for parent engagement 95% of the time (see table 6).

Table 6
Online respondents' report of key motivation for parents' involvement in their young children's education

Challenge Category	Percentage
To support their children's education	95%
To improve their children's schools and/or district	49%
To meet and network with other parents	27%
Other	4%

However, leaders believe that parents they lack the time to be more engaged (see table 7). In suburban communities, we heard about families losing much of their day to their commute to work. In urban and rural communities we heard about the need for parents to hold multiple jobs to support families, which in some instances was perceived to be an insurmountable barrier to their involvement in school.

As one leader stated, "[Parents] *want* to be involved, but economic factors are compounding the time issue." That is, time is becoming even more constrained with the economic downturn and the need to work additional jobs or over-time for families to stay solvent.

Table 7
Online respondents' report of key barriers for parents' involvement in their young children's education

Challenge Category	Percentage
Lack of time	91%
Not knowing the vehicles for participation	56%
Cultural or linguistic barriers	48%

Educational leaders are interested in expanding transition programs

Our online survey found that 95% of districts surveyed had at least one transition activity stated in their No Child Left Behind plans. Through our online survey, we heard that the overwhelming majority of district leaders believe their current transition activities are effective or very effective (see table 8). This differed from our one-on-one conversations, where every leader reported having few if any formal transition activities (most were at the school-level, specifically visits to elementary schools initiated by early care and education centers).

Table 8
Online respondents' report of the effectiveness of their district's transition programs

Challenge Category	Percentage
Very effective	12%
Effective	80%
Ineffective	9%
Very Ineffective	0%

Both our one-on-one and online interviewees were in agreement that developing or expanding transition activities is a high priority for district leaders (see table 9)⁴. In our one-on-one interviews, we heard that educational leaders were thinking about how to facilitate early care and education to elementary school transitions, but were concurrently looking for models that would also be applicable to ensuring smooth transitions from elementary school to middle school and middle school to high school.

Table 9
Online respondents' priority for developing or expanding transition programs

Challenge Category	Percentage
Very high priority	36%
High priority	43%
Moderate priority	17%
Low priority	4%
Very low priority	0%

⁴ The only districts consistently disinterested in improving school transitions were those with very small student populations, where leaders knew all the early care and education providers feeding students into the district.

Among all respondents, we heard educational leaders consistently looking for transition activities that would:

- help connect early care and education centers to elementary schools to improve provider quality and, in turn, student readiness;
- connect families with community-based services; and
- help families connect and register for pre-K and kindergarten.

Inadequate funding and staff time are the most significant barriers to expanding transitions programs

In our online survey, 94% of respondents listed the lack of funding and staff time as their greatest barrier to expanding transition activities (see table 10). The need for resources was echoed in our one-on-one conversations. Interviewees expressed the need to be able to free elementary teachers up so that they had the time to interact with early care and education providers. *More critically, interviewees noted the importance of community-based organizations in ensuring smooth transitions and that districts lack staff to develop and sustain relationships with these organizations.*

Table 10
Online respondent's most significant barrier to developing or expanding transition programs by categories

Challenge Category	Percentage
Lack of resources (funding and/or staff)	94%
Lack of connections with community resources	4%
Insufficient physical space for any new programs	2%

Districts have some connections to community organizations

Ninety percent of the online leaders and most of the one-on-one interviewees reported being well-connected to community organizations (see table 11). However, the types of organizations and strengths of the connections may be limited.

Table 11
Online respondent's perception of school district connection with community organizations

Challenge Category	Percentage
Very well connected	30%
Well connected	60%
Poorly connected	10%
Very poorly connected	0%

Online interviewees reported the majority of their partnerships were with Family Connections and early learning programs (see table 12). We heard similar connections in our one-on-one conversations, where most of the connections reported were at the school-level with community-based early care and education providers. When there were connections, most were connections between one school (or the district) with one organization. That is, there were no reports of multi-organization, coordinated efforts. The main reason provided for the lack of more complex connections was a lack of staff time to develop and maintain the connections. Accordingly, most districts rely on community-based organizations to initiate connections.

Table 12
Organizations online respondents' school districts have partnered with to support young children

Challenge Category	Percentage
Family Connections	83%
Early learning programs	53%
United Ways	32%
Parents as Teachers	21%

Districts are turning to institutions of higher education and United Ways for models of best practices that can be implemented with limited resources

Online respondents reported turning primarily to educational institutions and local United Ways for new models of parent engagement and transitions (see table 13). In the one-on-one interviews, the primary thought leaders for new models of practice were local United Ways.

Table 13
Organizations that respondents' school districts are turning to for new programmatic ideas and training for parent engagement and transitions

Challenge Category	Percentage
University of Georgia	45%
My local United Way	38%
Georgia State	28%
Parents as Teachers	26%
HIPPY	9%
United Way of America	8%

District leaders (online and one-on-one) reported primarily working with state and national organizations, to implement new programmatic models based on best practices. Educational leaders seek models that require few or no additional resources (see tables 14 and 15).

Table 14
Services from state and national organizations most valued by online respondents

Challenge Category	Percentage
Models of best practice programs	74%
Staff training	49%
Technical support on project implementation	36%
Suggestions on funding sources	28%

Table 15
Why online respondents valued services from state and national organizations

Challenge Category	Percentage
Low/no cost services	57%
Well tested or a certified best practice	49%
Previous positive experience using their services	45%
Easy to implement with existing staff	43%

Before implementing a new program, district leaders are most concerned about its proven effectiveness and its start-up and on-going costs

When talking with educational leaders about the SPARK Georgia models, a few leaders expressed being very interested in finding out more. Most respondents (on-line and

one-on-one) were cautiously interested. Universally, respondents stated they would need to see more information, specifically:

- *That the models would be effective with their families* – Ideally, leaders asked for local data or focus groups showing parents in their district were interested in the services (particularly home visitation). If national evaluation data was presented, the leaders said they would like to be able to see how the national data relates to their district’s demographics. Even local data may be met with skepticism. One leader stated, “Data from Gwinnett would be interesting but data about *our* [county’s] parents is critical.”
- *How this would tie in with existing parent engagement and transitions work and planning* – District leaders want to know how SPARK models will be complementary with existing efforts. For example one leader stated, “I would need to be shown how this fits with our existing parent engagement plan.” An online respondent wrote: “With so many initiatives, someone would have to find a way to integrate them with what exists.” As shown in both examples, leaders are looking for help in seeing the synergies and connections to their current work.
- *The start-up and on-going costs and sources* – As mentioned earlier, leaders are concerned about offering sustainable programs (rather than short-living pilot projects). Accordingly, interviewees consistently stated they would need to clearly know the costs and sources of support before moving forward.

Additionally, many leaders we talked to one-on-one were unfamiliar with home visitation programs and often dubious of the community demand and receptivity to this approach. As one leader put it, “I’m not sure if the community would want [home visitation] at all.” These leaders were also unclear about the intensity of services needed to make home visitation effective and who would most benefit. They wanted to understand specifics about the home visitation process such as how parents were recruited, their receptivity to home visits, and what activities were conducted with parents.

Implications for SmartStart Georgia

Our ultimate project objective is to help inform SmartStart Georgia’s effort to link their best-practice models of parent engagement and transitions to other communities throughout Georgia and the nation. In our work, a number of potential scaling strategies and considerations emerged and are detailed below.

Focus broadly on all types of school districts.

We found almost universal interest among the districts in SmartStart Georgia's models. The interest was level regardless of the challenges schools were facing, the number of students receiving free or reduced lunch, size of the student population, or other factors. Even districts that reported being satisfied with the effectiveness of current parent engagement and transition efforts concurrently reported improving and expanding these programs as a priority. Put simply, there were only a few leader respondents, online or one-on-one, who did not express some level of interest in SPARK Georgia's models of parent engagement and transitions. Leaders expressed interest because the models were perceived as being:

- low cost;
- able to leverage existing community organizations and resources;
- able to connect with parents at times that are convenient to them; and
- able to meet two key programmatic priorities for districts (engaging parents and ensuring smooth transitions).

Develop a package of critical data and information tailored to district-specific demographics and challenges.

Though our interviewees understand the value of SPARK Georgia's models, it was also clear that the challenge will be to convince leaders to invest in these programs over existing commitments. Leaders are concerned about knowing that the models:

- will be effective with *their* families;
- interlock with existing school district strategic direction and programs;
- can be implemented with minimal additional resources; and
- can be sustained for at least 3-5 years.

Further compounding the information needs of district leaders is that many of the districts provide significant discretion to Title I elementary school principals over how much of the money flowing to their schools is spent.

To help district leaders make informed decisions, we suggest creating a district-specific “package” of information to clearly communicate:

- **Evaluation data for SPARK models that ties to the district’s student and family demographics** – This data doesn’t necessarily require specific evaluations on each school district. Instead, we suggest parsing out SmartStart’s existing evaluation data, so that districts could see the effect on populations they are most concerned about.
- **A description of home visitation at the family-level** – Many of the leaders we spoke to one-on-one did not understand how home visitation, as a process plays out. Specifically, they expressed an interest in understanding the process from recruitment to dosage to completion, and why it is generally effective.
- **How the models leverage parents’ time** – The key barrier to parental engagement, as perceived by educational leaders, is the lack of time. Consequently, SmartStart Georgia could provide information on how their models work within parents’ time constraints, thereby increasing the appeal to school district leaders.
- **Detailed start-up and on-going costs and revenue sources for a five year period** – Costs are a primary concern of educational leaders. Clearly articulating the programmatic costs of SPARK models will reduce educational leader uncertainty. Concerns could be further reduced by suggesting one or more potential sources of sustained funding. That is not to say that the funding has to be from sources outside of district revenue, but rather a clear understanding of where funding could come from, rather than leaving it unspecified.
- **An explanation the added value of SPARK models for existing parent engagement staff’s work** – Of our online respondents, 73% reported having parent engagement staff already linking to community organizations and families. Part of the virtue of SmartStart’s SPARK parent engagement model is that it can work with existing staff. Accordingly, it would be useful to help leaders clearly understand how the model increases outcomes for children.

Create clear descriptions of the personnel needed for implementation and their roles.

District leaders expressed great concern about the types of staff required to implement the models and their qualifications. In response, SmartStart could develop “job descriptions” for the key players in their models, explaining not only the roles they play, but also the types of people inside and outside a school district who will most likely be successful in the position.

Continue efforts to affect state and federal funding policy.

Funding is the primary barrier to developing or expanding school district parent engagement and transition programs. District leaders' insecurity about state and federal funding will continue to make decisions on model adoption difficult. By helping to ensure sustained funding, especially funding directed specifically to parent engagement and transitions, SmartStart will mitigate one of the greatest challenges to scaling.

Develop strategic partnerships with key, trusted technical assistance providers.

Two primary technical assistance providers were identified by educational leaders: their local United Ways and the state universities (University of Georgia and Georgia State). Part of the perceived value of these providers is that they are trusted and have successfully helped districts in the past. Accordingly, they could be valuable strategic partners for disseminating and scaling SmartStart's work.

Adapt the transitions model to support elementary to middle school and middle school to high school transitions.

Leaders surveyed and interviewed showed an interest in having transitions programming for children entering elementary school. These leaders also consistently expressed the need for programming to support smooth transitions to later years. Adapting SmartStart's transitions model to accommodate later educational transitions could make it more attractive to district leaders as a "one-stop" solution to all their transition challenges.

Understand the effect of SmartStart's parent engagement model on long-term parent behavior.

District leaders noted parent engagement tends to decrease after the early years. Being able to show consistent, sustained involvement would increase the perceived return on investment for district leaders. Additionally, showing sustained support by parents for transitions at other ages (for example, for older siblings) could tie into district leaders' desire for transition supports into middle school and high school.

Appendix A- List of school district interviewees

Fulton County Schools

Vicki Denmark

Assistant Superintendent of Support Services

Mitchell County Schools

Victor Hill

Title I Director

Paulding County Schools

Yvette Hill

Assistant Superintendent

Atlanta City Schools

Mary Mohead

Title I Director

Douglas County Schools

Don Remillard

Superintendent

Renee Davis

Title I Director

Henry County Schools

Michael Surma

Superintendent

Gwinnett County Schools

Wrae Croom

Title I Program Specialist – Kindergarten Readiness and School Transition

Carol Grady

Director for Federal and Special Programs

Jean Walker

Area Superintendent

Butts County Schools

Linda Whitel

Superintendent

Appendix B- Online survey

Over the past three years, Smart Start, the early childhood division for the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta, has partnered with schools, early learning programs, and parents to develop new models for parent engagement and school transitions in children's preschool and early school years and test them as a powerful strategy for significantly improving children's school readiness and success.

Now we're hoping to learn from other district leaders like yourself about their school readiness and parent engagement work and challenges, and to elicit feedback about our work. Ultimately, we would like to know if the models we're defining can work on a much larger scale in terms of the numbers of Georgia school districts using similar approaches.

We greatly appreciate your taking the time to answer our questions.

Your answers will remain confidential, but we will be developing a summary of the survey results. There is an opportunity to request a copy of the summary at the end of the survey.

1. Which school district are you in?

Pull down list with all of Georgia's school districts

2. What is your title

- A. Superintendent
- B. Title I Director
- C. Title III Director
- D. Federal Funding Director
- E. Other (please specify)

3. What is your single greatest challenge in your elementary schools?

Open Answer

4. What do your principals and kindergarten teachers tell you about the children that are now entering kindergarten classroom? Are children prepared with the necessary skills to participate in kindergarten?

- A. Yes, they generally exceed our expectations of school readiness (skip to question 5)
- B. Yes, they generally meet our expectations of school readiness (skip to question 5)
- C. No, they generally don't meet our expectations (see question 4)

5. Which readiness skills re children lacking (check all that apply):

- A. Social and/or emotional development
- B. Literacy skills (pre-reading)
- C. Cognitive skills
- D. Physical skills?

6. What is the approximately percentage of non English speaking children who attend your district's elementary schools?

- A. Less than 5%
- B. From 5% to 15%
- C. 16% to 25%
- D. 26% or more

7. Over the next 3 to 5 years, the rate of non English speaking children who attend your district's elementary schools is expected to?

- A. Significantly increase
- B. Increase
- C. Remain the level
- D. Decrease
- E. Significantly decrease

8. Approximately how many children enter your kindergarten each year?

- A. Less than 100
- B. From 100 to 500
- C. From 500 to 1,000
- D. More than 1,000

9. Can you estimate the percentage children enter kindergarten without a Pre-K or child care experience?

- A. Less than 15%
- B. From 15% to 30%
- C. 31% to 45%
- D. 46% to 60%
- E. More than 61%

10. What parent involvement programs do you currently have district-wide in Title I schools?

Open Answer

11. Are parents on your design teams?

- A. Yes
- B. No

12. Do you have active PTAs?

- A. Yes
- B. No

13. When parents are involved, what do you think motivates them (check all that apply)?

- A. To improve their children's schools and/or district
- B. To support their children's education
- C. To meet and network with other parents
- D. Other (please specify): _____

14. What prevents parents from having greater involvement (check all that apply)?
- A. Lack of time
 - B. They don't know the vehicles for participation
 - C. Cultural or linguistic barriers
 - D. Other (please specify): _____
15. Do you have parent resource coordinators funded through Title I or III?
- A. Yes
 - B. No
16. What is their role (check all that apply)?
- A. Providing parenting literature to parents and/or community organizations
 - B. Visiting parents at home
 - C. Developing partnerships with community organizations
 - D. Reaching out to child care providers and centers
 - E. Other (please specify): _____
17. How high a priority is it for you to develop or improve your parent involvement activities?
- A. Very high priority
 - B. High priority
 - C. Moderate priority
 - D. Low priority
 - E. Very low priority
18. What is your greatest barrier to expanding or developing parent involvement programs (check all that apply)?
- A. Don't know of effective, low cost models
 - B. Not enough staff time
 - C. Lack of funding to launch efforts
 - D. Lack of funding to sustain efforts
 - E. Other (please specify): _____
19. Does your NCLB plan include transition activities or other transition activities?
- A. Yes (proceed to question 18)
 - B. No(proceed to question 19)
20. How effective are they?
- A. Very effective
 - B. Effective
 - C. Ineffective
 - D. Very ineffective
21. What is your single greatest concern or challenge in transitioning young children from early care to PK and K?

Open Answer

22. How high a priority is it for you to develop or improve your activities supporting the transition from early education and care to elementary school?

- A. Very high priority
- B. High priority
- C. Moderate priority
- D. Low priority
- E. Very low priority

23. What is your greatest single barrier to expanding or developing transition programs?

Open Answer

24. How connected do you feel your district is with community-based organizations?

- A. Very well connected
- B. Well connected
- C. Poorly connected
- D. Very poorly connected

25. Do you have lottery-funded Pre-K programs on site?

- A. Yes
- B. No

26. How have you partnered with any of the following community organizations to engage early learning programs/parents of pre-schoolers (check all that apply)?

- A. Early learning programs
- B. Family Connections
- C. United Ways
- D. Parents as Teachers
- E. Other (please specify):_____

27. What organizations, in GA and nationally, do you turn to for new programmatic ideas related to parent involvement and transitions (check all that apply)?

- A. United Way of America
- B. My local United Way
- C. Parents as Teachers
- D. Parent Services Project
- E. Georgia State
- F. University of Georgia
- G. HIPPY
- H. Other (please specify):_____

28. What services do these organizations offer that you find most valuable?

- A. Models of best practice programs
- B. Staff training
- C. Technical support on project implementation
- D. Suggestions on funding sources
- E. Other (please specify):_____

29. Why do you find these services valuable (check all that apply)? They are:

- A. Low or no cost
- B. Easy to implement using existing staff
- C. Well tested and/or a certified best practice
- D. Previous positive experience using their resources
- E. Other (please specify):_____

30. Let's review the SPARK GA Model for parent involvement and transitions.

Our work has focused on the following strategies:

1. Using Title I funds to start up and train school transition councils that would develop annual transition plans. These plans would include activities linking parents, early learning programs, and community groups to the schools and includes programs such as summer transition camps for rising 4 year old children and their families.

2. Using Title I and other funds to train and certify existing school parent liaisons as Parents as Teachers (PAT) parent educators, using the Parents as Teachers Born Learning curriculum (a research-based nationally recognized method for engaging parents).

3. Providing training, parent outreach, engagement, and leadership to existing Title I or III parent liaisons using the Parent Services Project's Stronger Together and Parent Leadership Institute curricula.

4. Combining PAT, Stronger Together, and Parent Leadership Institute curricula for use by community organizations which already have parent outreach workers (e.g. Even Start, Head Start, Family Connection).

Do these approaches resonate with you? How do they connect with your work?

Open Answer

31. Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey!

The individual answers will remain confidential, but we will be developing a summary of the survey results. If you want to receive a copy, please enter your email below.

Open Answer

Appendix C- List of survey respondents

Appling County Schools	Jasper County Schools
Bacon County	Jefferson County Schools
Baldwin County Schools	Jenkins County
Barrow County Schools	Lamar County Schools
Bartow County Schools	Lanier County Schools
Berrien County Schools	Lee County Schools
Bleckley County Schools	Liberty County Schools
Brooks County Schools	Macon County Schools
Bulloch County Schools	Madison County Schools
Burke County Schools	Marietta City Schools
Calhoun City Schools	Meriwether County Schools
Calhoun County Schools	Murray County Schools
Carroll County Schools	Oglethorpe County School System
Cherokee County Schools	Peach County
Clinch County Schools	Pelham City Schools
Cobb County	Pierce County Schools
Colquitt County	Polk School District
Commerce City Schools	Pulaski County Schools
Cook County Schools	Putnam County Schools
Crawford County Schools	Quitman County Schools
Crisp County School System	Rabun County Schools
Dade County Schools	Richmond County Schools
Decatur City Schools	Schley County Schools
Dodge County Schools	Stephens County Schools
Dooly County	Talbot County School System
Dublin City Schools System	Thomas County Schools
Echols County Schools	Thomaston-Upson County
Emanuel County Schools	Thomasville City Schools
Evans County Schools	Treutlen County Schools
Fayette County Schools	Trion City Schools
Glynn County Schools	Turner County Schools
Grady County Schools	Twiggs County Schools
Hall County Schools	Valdosta City Schools
Harris County Schools	Walton County Public Schools
Heard County School System	Warren County Schools
Houston County	Wayne County Schools
Irwin County Board of Education	Webster County Schools